DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 633 FL 022 329

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TITLE Negotiating Power: Critical Literacy Practices in a Bilingual Classroom.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Bilingual Students; *Classroom Communication; Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Discourse Analysis; *English (Second Language); *Group Dynamics; Language Patterns; Language Styles; *Literacy Education; Persuasive Discourse; Primary Education; *Spanish Speaking

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the interpersonal dynamics occurring in an ungraded bilingual education class of native Spanish-speaking students in an ungraded primary classroom (with 10-12 students each from grades one, two, and three) at Garamond Elementary School in a working class community southeast of Los Angeles, California. Six classroom sessions were taped for discourse analysis focusing on the language patterns used by students and the ways students positioned themselves through language in relation to each other. One session was conducted entirely by students. Data were also drawn from observation, student and teacher interviews, and written work spanning six months. Analysis of the data suggest two common patterns of verbal expression: (1) a direct, argumentative form in which individuals overtly position themselves, in relation to other students, as for or against particular arguments; and (2) introduction of new ideas into discussion without argumentative positioning, often in the forms of helpful suggestions or comments. The class session conducted by students, late in the year, illustrates these two dynamics and the fact that the students have internalized a basic framework for argumentation. Similar patterns also appeared in teacher-led classes and were influenced by the teacher's participation. It is proposed that such interactions are influential in helping students organize thinking and use language in specific ways, and can influence literacy development and self-expression. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Negotiating power:
Critical literacy practices in a bilingual classroom

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 4-8, 1994

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Introduction

The data analyzed in this paper were collected as part of a larger qualitative research project investigating the nature of literacy practices across various activity settings in two elementary school bilingual classrooms. The project is framed within a sociocultural perspective on learning, in which "mental" aspects of knowledge acquisition are viewed as integrally bound up with social and contextual forces, and in which literacy development is viewed as a gradual process of enculturation into communities of practice that use oral and written language in particular, internally meaningful ways. This perspective is built from extensive work in diverse disciplines, including Vygotskian socio-historical psychology and Soviet Activity Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985), cross-cultural psychology and anthropology (Price-Williams, 1962; Scribner and Cole, 1973; Scribner, 1977), aspects of cognitive psychology (Lave, 1988; Brown, Collins, & DuGuid, 1989; Greeno, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1992), and socio-linguistics (Gee, 1990, 1992, in press), as well as from detailed examinations of the literacy practices of diverse social groups (see for example Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

This paper focuses on data from one activity setting within one of the two classrooms, that of classroom meetings, or "Juntas Generales." These meetings were developed by the teacher as a means of operationalizing a version of Critical Pedagogy - a pedagogical "Discourse" (in Gee's 1990 sense of the term) that eludes a precise definition, but which draws from a Freirian problem-posing approach to education (Freire, 1970) as well as from a Bakhtinian view of language as the site of struggle, and a Gramscian emphasis on human agency in the promotion of social change (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Giroux, 1988) . Critical pedagogy calls for teachers to engage in a "dialectical celebration of critique and possibility...in a discourse which integrates critical analysis with social transformation" (Giroux, 1988, p. 133); students are to name, confront, and analyze real problems that are of concern to them in the world, and to take action to solve them.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the oral discourse that students engage in these classroom meetings in order to illuminate some of the ways in which power is constructed, shared, or negotiated through language within this room, and to consider the implications of this for students' enculturation into particular forms of literacy.

The study

Data for this study were collected through participant observation in a year-long research project in an ungraded primary classroom (with 10-12 students each from grades 1, 2, and 3) at Garamond Elementary School,[1] which is located in a working class community southeast of Los Angeles. The majority of the students are the children of Mexican immigrants; a smaller number of children were born in Mexico or Central America and immigrated here with their families. All of the students speak Spanish, and Spanish predominated in most classroom activities. Seventy eight per cent of the students are from families that qualify for free lunches under government low income guidelines.

Six classroom meetings were audiotaped and transcribed for a discourse analysis, which focused on the language patterns used by students in these meetings, and the ways in which students positioned themselves through language in relation to each other. One of the sessions was run entirely by the students themselves; the teacher was present for the other sessions. Field notes were taken during all sessions in order to capture the names of the speakers in turn and details of the participants' interaction. Data from field notes that were taken during observations of other meetings and in other classroom activity settings, from informal interviews with the students and teacher, and from an examination of written work produced by students over a six month period were used to triangulate the data and to contextualize the analysis of the spoken words.

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used for the school, the students, and the teacher

The Activity Setting: The Juntas

These classroom meetings, which are usually held several times each week, were designed by the teacher to provide a forum for discussing problems, issues, or concerns that any class member (including the teacher) wishes to bring to the group's attention; points for inclusion in the next meeting's agenda are listed on a clipboard that hangs near the door. The meetings are led by a student (selected by the previous meetings' leader); a secretary takes notes, and a timekeeper calls the end of the meeting with a vote.

For each meeting, the children form a large circle in the center of the room; there is considerable noise and overlapping speech as they settle into the circle formation. The leader then calls for order and proceeds to read the first point on the agenda, and the person who brought that issue for discussion presents his or her concern. Individuals then respond to the issue and make suggestions for resolving it. After about 15 minutes, the timekeeper calls a vote; at this point the list of suggestions is read aloud, and the vote is taken. The "solution" that is chosen by the class is put into action by the students themselves. The teacher casts a vote as one member of the class; however she usually waits until the students have voted so as not to influence their responses.

The official class rules for the meetings are designed to promote attentive, respectful listening; participants are expected to look at the person who is talking, not to out of turn, offer no "put-downs" or insults, and to accept all ideas. These rules have been stated explicitly on different occasions, and developed in practice, with the leader monitoring their enforcement. Students are also expected to raise their hands and be recognized by the leader before speaking, although some degree of overlapping speech is tolerated.

Issues that have been brought for discussion at these meetings include local classroom concerns (the use and distribution of classroom materials, interactions between students, and proposals for activities), playground problems (the use and distribution of playground equipment, problems between students on the yard), and larger social concerns (environmental issues such as recycling, the rights of local workers, and the rights of Farmworkers are a few examples). In each case, the class vote decides on the best "solution" to each problem, and action is taken that ranges from the sanctioning of individuals in the classroom to calls for petitions, marches, or the boycotting of products, such as the grapes that were served by the school cafeteria.

Positioning and Counter-positioning

Two patterns of verbal expression are commonly used in these meetings. One is a direct, argumentative form in which individuals overtly position themselves in relation to other students as for or against particular arguments and sometimes offer new propositions for debate. These contributions are typically introduced with the words "I agree with X" or "I don't agree with Y," with some rationale offered for the position (forming a basic two line stanza), and often with an elaboration of the rationale and a concluding comment (resulting in a four-line stanza).

Two examples of this, from one meeting, follow:

POSITIONING: I agree with Jesús
RATIONALE: because I've seen her be a troublemaker.

POSITIONING: I don't agree with Carie
RATIONALE: because Arelia is behaving well
ELABORATION OF RATIONALE: and she's always good with Dalma
CONCLUDING ELABORATION: and I never see her doing anything bad.

Another example, from a meeting in which the teacher had proposed that the class consider mobilizing to change the name of the school in honor of the United Farmworkers' leader, César Chávez, shows the complexity of some of the students' arguments:

POSITIONING: I don't agree with the teacher about changing the name
RATIONALE: because many people know this school as Garamond, Garamond Elementary School,
ELABORATION: and if the farm owners don't like the fact that our school changes to the César Chávez School, they might fire the farmworkers
CONCLUDING ELABORATION: and that would just be our fault.

Most of the students follow this argumentative format in voicing their contributions to the meetings, and most meetings proceed as a series of position statements on existing propositions. After each contribution, discussion ensues which either attempts to refute the rationale that was offered, argue for or against the new proposition, or refer back to an earlier issue raised in the meeting. Sometimes, however, a second form is used, in which new ideas are introduced into the discussion *without* the students positioning themselves argumentatively; these contributions have the tone and appearance of helpful suggestions or comments rather than position statements. For example in the meeting in which the teacher proposed changing the school's name, Selena responded to another student (who had objected to the idea on the basis that the school song would no longer be appropriate) by saying: "I've been thinking about that. Why don't we make, like, a song - make it up, and show it to them, and if you like it, you like it, and if you don't, you don't."

In order to participate effectively in these meetings, students need to listen carefully to what others say, formulate their own opinions about the issue, and devise an effective way of connecting their own ideas with the ideas of others. They have to present some rationale for their own opinions, and be prepared to defend their positions against the criticisms of others. They are also challenged to think of effective and creative solutions to classroom problems, as well as ways to package their ideas to make them more attractive to their classmates. Furthermore, students are not simply engaged in *solving* problems; the open agenda of the meetings allows them to *pose* problems, to critically examine local reality and name issues for collective discussion and transformation.

In doing all of these things, students are engaged in an active, expressive, and opinionated form of oral literacy, a form that is rarely allowed in the classrooms of working class children in this country, much less among language minority students. Students go far beyond traditional, limited, reductionistic uses of language in the classroom, and instead use language to formulate positions and to mobilize others for taking action in the world.

At the same time, these meetings were designed not simply to enculturate students into powerful forms of language use, but rather to *challenge* traditional power structures by engaging students in a collective process of critically examining local realities and taking action for change. On this account, these meetings may have contradictory results. A close analysis of what goes on in one meeting suggests that students may use these new forms of language only to engage in old forms of competitive classroom interaction, and may at times work to undermine each others' power rather than to forge collective strength.

Dynamics of power

In order to consider what goes on in these meetings, both in relation to the negotiation of power in the classroom and for implications for students' literacy acquisition, I will examine in some detail the classroom meeting in which the teacher was not present. (The teacher was out of the room at a meeting; the classroom aide was present in the room, but sat at her desk in the corner doing paperwork, and made no interventions into the flow of the meeting.) This meeting took place late in the school year, after students had considerable experience with the form and function of these meetings; the teacher's absence provides for an "un-adult-erated" example of this oral discourse, and allows us to consider what students have internalized about the meetings. The following is an outline of the major "episodes" of this meeting:

1. Isabela (the leader) formally opens the meeting and calls on Carie to present the first item on the agenda. Carie tries to present her issue. She is cut off by Carlos and Johnny, who accuse her of eating candy, which is not allowed "in the group." One girl tries to defend Carie by explaining that she's not eating candy, but rather a cough drop ("that's for her mouth"). Carie persists in presenting her issue. She presents both the problem (that children are stealing pencils) as well as her proposed solution (that there be boxes for all the children so that they can bring pencils from home and have a place to keep them at their desks). Elena and Eduardo say something (unclear on the audiotape), but their comments are not picked up by other students. Eduardo is cut off by further discussion of Carie's "candy." Carie finally succumbs to the pressure, and takes the "candy" out of her mouth.

2. Carlos, who persisted in making his point through several interruptions while the removal of Carie's "candy" was negotiated, positions himself in opposition to Carie (saying "I don't agree with Carie..."), by accusing Carie of wanting to make the teacher spend more money (and to feel bad) by buying new pencils for the class.

3. Alicia tries to suggest that students bring pencils from home (what Carie herself had argued), but is cut off by a boy, speaking in English, who tells Carie, "Tell your mom to buy some." Carie retorts, "I already have some!"

4. Isabela calls for more ideas.

5. Marisa argues against Carie, saying that the class already has boxes and doesn't need any more. Jesús echoes Marisa. The idea "No boxes" is written down by the secretary.

6. Elena reacts to Carie without clearly positioning herself for or against Carie's idea .

7. Carlos suggests that *Carie* should buy the pencils.

8. Aracely suggests it would be better if "we" buy boxes. Cindy says she agrees with Magda (which causes some confusion because it was in fact Aracely who had spoken), so that the teacher won't have to spend her money.

9. Carie says that she agrees with Jesús, that no boxes are needed. Instead she argues for bringing pencils from home, labeling them, and leaving them at the desks.

10. Carlos positions himself against Carie by responding to her reference to the *desks* with the question "Where are we going to get so many desks from?" Carie responds by claiming that there *are* enough *chairs* in the room, because everyone has a chair when the class plays Heads Up Seven Up, and besides, there are more at the computer.

11. Aracely positions herself with Marisa (her best friend), who had argued that there was no need for boxes.

12. Carlos asks Carie if *she* is going to buy new boxes for everyone. Carie defends herself, saying "I'm not saying that" repeatedly.

13. Johnny echoes Carlos' argument about Carie wanting the teacher to spend more money, which will be wasted, because "we" (the students) have not taken care of the things (like markers) that she has bought in the past. Carlos then endorses Johnny's argument, noting more things the teacher has bought and repeating the fact that "we" lost or did not care for the markers. He again picks up on Carie's mention of the desks, arguing that if Carie gets a new desk, she'll be happy, but the other students will not. Carie tries to respond to this by saying "So be happy!" but Carlos repeats his accusation. Carie once again tries to respond, but Isabela calls Carie to order.

14. Elena makes a suggestion that the teacher not spend more money but rather that the children do something (portions were unclear on the transcript).

15. Carie speaks directly to Carlos, bringing the discussion back to the issue of pencils (not boxes) - that the children should bring pencils from home. Johnny and Carlos persist in arguing against the details of Carie's position: "Then why did you say boxes?" "And why did you say desks?" Jesus similarly argues against Carie's suggestion to bring pencils from home, because the children can also steal pencils. This tips off a series of accusations about stealing pencils: Cindy accuses Carie of having stolen pencils. Carie defends herself. Sarai accuses Cindy of the same.

Jesús defends her. Elena accuses Marco of talking about stealing a pencil. Marco defends himself. In the midst of this, Carie effectively rescinds her argument that anyone bring anything.

16. The timekeeper announces that it is time to vote; Ivan reads the list of "suggestions" (which does *not* include Carie's suggestions either of boxes or pencils, but only the negation of these); Carie tries to get her idea in on the list (unsuccessfully); the vote is called and negotiated. "No boxes" receives the most votes. Carlos and Johnny cheer. Carie tells them that was what she voted for.

In this meeting what appears to transpire is a competitive struggle for power in the classroom, with language used in complex ways, but ways that serve to divide students rather than to empower the group. This struggle proceeds principally as an attack on one outspoken girl (Carie), led by an equally outspoken boy (Carlos), overtly backed up by his friend (Johnny), and (perhaps unwittingly) supported by many other students. This attack takes place on different levels, with the initial move consisting of accusations about Carie eating candy in the group, and subsequent moves attacking *all* of Carie's positions, focusing on the details of her argument, and ignoring her intent.

This attack, led by Carlos, is waged not only through overt positioning against Carie, as indicated by opening arguments with the words, "I don't agree with Carie," but also by indirect positioning *with* the absent teacher; the students claim the voice of authority that the teacher herself works very hard to diminish. Again, this is first done by accusing Carie of eating candy (a distinctively authority-like move), and then by calling attention to how much the teacher spends on the class (with Carlos and Johnny sympathetically aligning themselves with the teacher), and questioning Carie's motives (claiming that she wants to make the teacher spend more money, *really* because she wants to make the teacher unhappy, and to make herself happy at others' expense.)

It should be noted, however, that in aligning themselves *sympathetically* with the teacher, Carlos and Johnny do *not* claim the teachers' perspective, and in fact position themselves linguistically along with the other students (using the marker "we"), essentially as "bad" children who do not take care of the things the teacher buys for the class. Carie, on the other hand, separates herself from the students in her opening argument by saying:

> I wrote boxes for all of *the children,*
> because, since *everyone is stealing* the pencils,
> it's better that *they* have boxes on *their* tables
> and that *the children* bring pencils from *their* home
> and put them on *their* desk
> And then when *they* want to do something
> *they* can sit at *their* desk
> and get the pencil
> and *they* do it" (emphases added).

In doing this, Carie positions herself on a parallel plane with the teacher, or at least separates herself from the "bad" children who do "bad" things. In the end, though, her introduction of this problem of stolen pencils comes back to haunt her, and she is singled out as the worst transgressor. Perhaps the offense against Carie is waged as a defensive reaction to her (loosely framed) accusation against other students; perhaps it is waged as reprisal for Carie's audacity in assuming an adult's perspective in a world where adults are constructed as good and powerful, and children as bad and powerless.

At times, the assaults on Carie are direct, as when Carlos speaks out of turn to say "Let Carie buy the pencils!" or when he involves Carie's mother in the issue (attacks on mothers being especially vicious in Latino culture) by saying "Tell your mom to buy some." At other times, they are more indirect. Carlos and Johnny are particularly adept at focusing on the *details* of

Carie's arguments (or their assumptions about the details she left unexplained), and not on their larger sense. In his opening statement, Carlos says nothing about the problem of the pencil shortage, and makes the assumption that to have new boxes the teacher would have to buy them (and that that is what Carie intended). The other students follow suit in the meeting; no one ever "rises to the meta-level" (Gee, 1993) to shed light on what was intended by each speaker, or what is really going on.

Throughout the meeting, Carie repeatedly tries to defend herself from these attacks. She does this in different ways: by outright denial (denying, for example, that she had candy in her mouth, and denying, later, that she stole any pencils), by responding to the details of off-centered attacks (explaining to Carlos why there are, in fact, enough desks in the room), and by changing the specifics of her position (from calling for boxes to calling for names on the pencils, to giving up and saying just that "they bring what they're going to bring" - again, using the third person plural to refer to other students). In responding to the attacks, however, she effectively licenses them, which may reinforce the strength of the opposition. At one point late in the meeting, Carie does try to explain herself explicitly to Carlos (who does not appear to be trying to understand her at all); she is interrupted by two passionate defenses of the teacher posed by Johnny and Carlos:

Johnny: And the teacher is going to spend a lot of money on us!
Look, she already spent money on the pencils and the markers,
but now we've lost them; we've already almost lost them all,
and she *(Carie)* wants more money? wasted?

Carlos: I *very* much agree with Johnny,
because she *(the teacher)* fixed the couches,
she bought new pencils, new markers,
and already she, already we've lost them,
and we've left them uncovered,
And now we want to buy desks?!
Carie said no, that ??? *(unclear)*
What if *you* get a new desk?
The other kids are going to want one
You'll be happy, and the others won't!

Despite these attacks, Carie persists in explaining that she is not talking about the teacher spending any money, she is simply talking about bringing pencils from home:

Carie: Look, Carlos, look.
I'm not saying that she should buy more boxes,
because that costs money.
I'm just saying that they bring pencils from the, from home...

However, she is cut off by Johnny, who says "Then why did you say boxes?" Carlos echoes Johnny: "And why did you say desks? You said it right now." In the end, Carie rescinds her suggestions, and ultimately votes for the negation of her own idea.

In all of this, the other students participate less boldly, but perhaps no less innocently in the attacks against Carie. Marisa and Jesús, for example, argue simply that there is no need for boxes in the room. However, they frame their arguments as oppositional statements (opening with the words, "I don't agree with Carie"), thus fueling the attack; and neither responds to the real issue

that concerned Carie (the lack of pencils). Their suggestion, that there be *no boxes* (the negation of Carie's idea) is recorded by the secretary - while Carie's original suggestion of having boxes never is!

Three other students (Elena, Aracely, and Cindy) seem to intervene more innocently in the discussion, opening their suggestions with the non-positional words, "Better that..," or else positioning themselves in *agreement* with other students, including Carie. But despite this appearance of peacemaking, both actually help to accelerate the attack; Aracely does this by introducing the possibility that Carie may have stolen the pencils herself (using somewhat hesitant language to do this), while Cindy echoes Aracely, framing her accusation in a position of supposed *agreement* with Carie, by saying "I agree with Carie, because the other day I saw Carie, and she, she stole pencils."

This last example makes particularly clear what is evident in many of the arguments the children make: that the rationale does not necessarily serve to ground the position the students take, but rather has a purpose of its own. In this case, Cindy seems more interested in attacking Carie (following a chain of accusations about stolen pencils that Carie may have set herself up for in her opening speech) than in explaining why she agrees with her. And while Carlos and Johnny do not pretend to agree with Carie at all, their arguments against her position are not directed to the issue Carie brought for discussion, but rather at best against some of the details of her argument, and at worst against her motives, or against her vie for power in the classroom.

Speculations on the construction of this discourse

It appears that the children in this classroom have internalized a basic framework for argumentation in these classroom meetings. This framework reflects the predominant Western conceptualization of arguments (or even "discussions") as war-like maneuvers, which involve positioning, attacking, defending, and undermining the contributions of one's "enemies" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The children seem well-apprenticed into the metaphors of Western culture (which of course do not operate at a conscious level, but which profoundly shape the nature of their interactions), and they bring those meanings into this setting - a setting which has actually been designed as a means of *challenging* (this itself being a metaphor that bears reflection) traditional, war-like approaches to the resolution of problems. For the children these meetings may be more about winning or losing in relation to others in the classroom than about collectively solving problems that confront them in the world.

Within this discourse of argumentation, however, there appear to be two strains. One is a bold, confrontational, "bad-cop" approach, and one is a perhaps more sophisticated, diplomatic, but no less war-like, "good-cop" approach (diplomacy being the continuation of war by other means). The two strands are somewhat differentially used by gender, with the boys more likely to use the overt stance, and the girls more likely to use the more subtle approach. (However, both boys and girls do use both of the forms at different times, and many more girls and boys do not participate verbally *at all* in this meeting, making it difficult to speculate on what forms they would use should they do so. Furthermore, the forms differ in appearance, and not necessarily in effect.)

If in fact it is true that girls and boys in this room display themselves differently in the discussion, then one might speculate that this is because girls and boys are differentially enculturated into practices of argumentation, and different expectations are placed on each as to how they are to engage in this war-like practice (which, however it is waged, is still war). This may lend further insight into why Carie was attacked so vehemently. Carie, after all, is an outspoken student, who controls quite effectively the male-dominated discourse form (which has the appearance at least of being more powerful, as it involves a more public display). The boys' attack may be a less-than-conscious-but-still-very-real effort to put Carie in her appropriate place. At the same time, the boys may actually assist Carie in her enculturation into the bolder form of practice, by forcing her into positions from which she will have to defend herself or wage her own

counterattacks in order to save face. (At the same time, Carie is one of the few girls who interacts regularly with these boys during other classroom activities; she appears to get along with them quite well. In fact, it is possible that Carie's ideas were attacked so strongly in this meeting precisely *because* her relationship with her "attackers" is so secure.)

It should be noted that the bolder framework for argumentation was never explicitly taught by the teacher, and that while it is has been modeled by her in other meetings, it does not appear to be the exclusive model that she engages, nor the one she prefers, as she typically models a much more collaborative approach to discussion. Yet it *is* the model that appears to have been picked up most effectively by the students, perhaps because it resonates well with the larger cultural practices to which these children are being enculturated.

Two factors in the structure of these meetings may also contribute to the emergence of this discourse. One is the fact that the focus of the meetings is on *solving* problems, rather than on critically examining the root causes of the issues that are brought for discussion, and the other is the competitive nature of the voting system, in which only one solution among many good suggestions can "win" at each meeting.

The role of the teacher

The meeting that was described above represents the extreme end of this practice of positioning and counterpositioning, or war-like approach to discussion. Nevertheless, similar maneuvers were made in most other classroom meetings. A number of meetings, for example, were called to discuss interactional problems between students in the room, and proceeded with a series of accusations and counter-accusations about who was doing what to whom. In one of those meetings, a first grader was singled out for attack; she responded to this attack with tears, and the meeting broke down.

At the same time, many of the meetings had a friendlier tone. This was particularly true when the issues that were raised were not inflammatory ones, but rather dealt with organizational issues or larger social concerns. Most of the issues that were brought to the meeting by the teacher were of this nature, whereas about half of the issues brought by the students were more locally provocative ones. This is one important way in which the teacher influences the nature of these meetings.

Another way in which Ms. Lyons influences both the flow and outcomes of the meeting is through her active and vocal participation, despite her self-expressed interest in diminishing the power of her own voice so as to empower the students. She speaks more than any other person in most meetings (in part because she is quickly recognized by the leader whenever she raises her hand), and each of her interventions is considerably longer than those of even the most vocal students. But in each of these interventions, Ms. Lyons models critical and analytical ways of examining the issues, and she often highlights aspects of problems that students did not appear to see. For example, in the discussion of her own proposal to change the school name, students offered the following rationale for objecting to the proposal:

-parents would have to go to too many meetings and sign too many papers
-other classes might not want to change the name
-this might cause some kids to not want to be friends with the kids in this class
-parents and other people might not want to change the name
-the school song would not fit
-the school cheer would not fit: "How are we going to say 'Give me a cheer. How are we going to spell out C-E-S-A-R CH-A-V-E-Z?"
-kids might say "I don't want to be in that school! That's dumb!"
-other kids might not want to come and play at the school.

Ms. Lyons responded to these objections with the following intervention:

> This is my opinion. I believe that all of these things are excuses. That the kids aren't going to want to play here, the song, how's the song going to be, how are we going to do the cheer...All of those things are very easy to fix. I think that we need to, that we should be proud of who that man was, that great man, of peace and of justice. We can change the song easily. You know that before we had another song about Garamond. And when Ms. B (*the principal)* came here, she changed it. Then she could do it again, if she wants...Before it was just in English. She made the song in Spanish. So then, we could change the song. And if someone doesn't want to come to our school because the school's name is César Chávez, then, they shouldn't come! He was a great man! He was a man of peace, and he helped the poor, he helped Latinos. And I think it is an honor to have that name.

Clearly, with such a speech, Ms. Lyons uses the power of her teacher/adult voice to argue for her own opinions. Yet by doing so, she presents a perspective that might not otherwise be heard, she models a critical approach to the analysis of argumentative positions, and she pushes the students on their possible resistance to change. Rather than abusing her position of power, she may play an important role in combating some of the forces that limit students' willingness to explore a wide range of possibilities in the world around them. Notably, too, the power that her voice assumes in this setting should not be over-estimated. In the case of this meeting, the students strongly outvoted Ms. Lyons and did *not* agree to change the name of the school.

Other ways in which Ms. Lyons influences the flow of these meetings are less overt, but no less significant . She plays an important role in re-voicing the contributions of students whose ideas are either not heard, or not understood; she calls students' attention to other students when they speak; she asks critical questions at key junctures; and she corrects misinterpretations and checks that the ideas that are offered are (somewhat) accurately recorded by the secretary. In doing this, she also tends to endorse the ideas that are most attractive to her, and she questions the ideas that she would find difficult to accept; yet she stresses the importance of students' making their own decisions about what they believe.

Implications for literacy development

While these meetings principally provide a space for students' oral language development, with no *direct* connection to written language (except for note-taking by the secretary), there is a demonstrable theoretical connection between oral and written language uses, and literacy acquisition is largely about learning ways of organizing thinking and using language in specific ways (Gee, 1990; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Heath, 1983). Much as Share Time talk may prepare students for the development of narrative writing (Michaels, 1986), the oral language skills that are modeled and developed in these meetings may serve students for the development of other written genres, such as editorials, speeches, position papers, reaction papers, and critiques - powerful written genres that are not typically cultivated in elementary school classrooms, much less in the schools of working class and language minority youth.

But, just as the teacher plays an important role in modeling alternative forms of discussion in the meetings, without which students may *not* have developed certain skills, so too she may need to play an active role in encouraging students to adapt these language uses into the world of written words. While students engage in considerable writing in this classroom (with several hundred student-authored books produced over the school year), the two principal genres that are

regularly encouraged are "stories" and journal writing. In these, the powerful and opinionated voices that emerge in the classroom meetings are seldom heard.

Occasionally, however, both passionate arguments and collaborative calls to action appear even in the unlikely space of narrative writing. As one example, two boys (Jesús and Carlos V.) wrote a book that began as a story about farmworkers but then took on the tone of an editorial:

> Un día los campesinos fueron a trabajar. Estaban pizcando uvas. Por favor, no coman uvas. Tienen pesticidas. No coman uvas para ayudar a la gente. Los campesinos quieren 1. No pesticidas 2. Más dinero. 3. Que sus hijos vayan a la escuela. 4. Casas y comida. 5. Paz y libertad. Necesitamos reunirnos para ayudarles a los campesinos.
>
> *(One day the farmworkers went to work. They were picking grapes. Please, don't eat grapes. They have pesticides. Don't eat grapes so you help people. The farmworkers want 1. No pesticides. 2. More money. 3. For their children to go to school. 4. Houses and food. 5. Peace and liberty. We need to get together to help the farmworkers.)*

Carie and two boys also wrote a book about farmworkers, which reported on the conditions of farmworker families and implored the audience not to eat grapes because they have pesticides. Magdalena, Cindy, and Mara wrote a third book about farmworkers, beginning their book as a story "Once upon a time there were 100 farmworkers who worked to help their families," but ending it with a call to action: "Long live the farmworkers! Don't use pesticides!"

Rosa wrote a story that intertwined a report-like genre with an editorial tone to discuss rapist who was at large in the town at the time:

> En la ciudad de ___ hay un señor que viola y secuestra a las ancianas y las viola. Yo creo que si lo agarran, lo deven de poner en la silla eléctrica porque un hombre así no merece vivir. No es justo que ese señor esté haciendo esto a las niñas, a las viejitas, a las jovenes y a las señoras casadas. Como quisiera que agarraron a este hombre sin sentimientos. Espero en Dios agarran a ese hombre. Todas las mujeres de ___ tienen miedo. El señor ese es blanco, de 6 pies, y pesa 200 libras. Tengan cuidado.
>
> *(In the city of ___ there is a man who rapes and kidnaps old women and rapes them. I think that if they capture him, they should put him in the electric chair because a man like that does not deserve to live. It's not fair that that man should be doing this to girls, to old women, to young women and to married women. How I hope they capture that man without feeling. I hope in God that they get that man. All of the women of ___are afraid. The man is white, 6 feet tall, and weighs 200 pounds. Be careful.)*

Rosa and two other girls also each wrote a book in which they argued for the benefits of recycling, explaining why and how to recycle, and calling on their audience to join them in this task. The tone in each of these books was persuasive, but not as strongly argumentative as in the story of the rapist, nor as expressive as the voices that argued for positions in classroom meetings.

The other space in which the opinionated voices of these children were given space for translation into written form was in occasional group letters that were written in response to a political issue. For example, the class wrote letters on behalf of local street vendors, who were being harassed by the police, and whose rights were being discussed in city council meetings; they

wrote letters to the owner of farm land located directly in back of the school, protesting his use of pesticides; and they wrote letters of support on behalf of Chicano hunger strikers at UCLA. These were group writing projects rather than individual assignments; students did not typically initiate such assignments on their own. (During their daily writing workshop, they almost always chose to write stories for publication as classroom books.)

The fact that students initiate few writing forms that parallel the powerful and opinionated oral literacy practices used in the juntas does not mean, of course, that they can not or will not develop them given the opportunity. Students may, however, need exposure to alternative genres in order to consider exploring these in their own writing; they may need appropriate and motivating outlets for this kind of writing. Students might also benefit from some explicit attention to the relationship between the arguments they put forth in the juntas and the kinds of argumentation that might be used in these forms of writing.

Summary and Conclusions

Ms. Lyons' self described goals in developing these classroom meetings were to show students that they really have a voice in the way things are run, that they have "real power" to change the world, and that voting is important. In striving toward these goals, however, Ms. Lyons operates against forces much larger than herself and her intentions. As the analysis of the first meeting seems to indicate, students may make their voices heard, they may assume "real power," and they may recognize the power of the vote - but they may use this power only to divide themselves among themselves, rather than to forge a collaborative re-vision of the world.

At the same time, students are not simply locked into deterministic patterns of expression in these meetings, or in their writing; they are engaged in a constructive process in which they at least partially appropriate both old and new cultural patterns, and transform them as they develop them in practice. Furthermore, what students may in fact be learning in this classroom are *multiple forms of struggle*, each of which may be useful to them in their lives as ethnic minorities and members of the working class. Unlike in most classrooms in this country, these students are not engaged in minimalist responses to teacher-directed and evaluated questions (Mehan, 1979); they are operating in a group space which values the formation of opinions, which encourages them to find ways to insert their ideas into group discussions, and to ground, support, and connect their ideas to the ideas of others. Some of these forms are argumentative or combative in nature (with those warlike skills at times turned inward rather than toward more appropriate "enemies"), and some of these forms are more collaborative, constructive, or "possibilitarian" in nature. At the very least these students are *not* being enculturated into a practice of linguistic passivity. The oral discourse which the children engage in these juntas may serve them as preparation not for objective, detached, passionless literacies in the way that Share Time discourse does in traditional classrooms, but for powerful, passionate, and opinionated literacies that may be essential forces for changing the world.

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